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ABSTRACT

Five arguments supporting the existence of two national individual events tournaments in forensics are presented in this paper. The first argument offered is that two national tournaments are needed to accommodate two valid but divergent views of what a national tournament should be--the National Forensic Association's view that the national tournament should be structured to encourage a large number of students to qualify and the American Forensic Association's view that the national tournament should be a competition among a limited number of individuals. The second argument is that having two national tournaments is economically wise, since one tournament is bound to be closer to potential participants than the other. The third argument is that holding two nationals restores power to the people, since it allows participants to choose which to attend. The fourth argument is that holding two nationals enhances the ability to recognize forensic excellence and that national recognition and awards at such tournaments impress the people who fund forensics programs. The final argument is that healthy competition between two national tournaments is likely to induce adoption of innovations that will improve individual events. (GT)

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Two Games in Town

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Like many of you, I grew up in a small town. Mine was located in the midwest, near the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The major activity on a Friday night was either visiting the local malt shop or going to a movie at the town's only theatre. About a year after we would see a movie advertised in the Twin City papers, it would finally appear at our local theatre. We complained, but we still attended regularly because it was the only theatre in town--or as they said in the movies, it was the only game in town.

This concept of "the only game in town" is closely related to the arguments which I will be presenting in support of two national championships for individual events. To avoid misinterpreting my arguments, it is essential that you understand two things. First, I do not wish to imply that either of the national tournaments is better than the other; second, I am not advocating attendance at both tournaments. Instead, I submit that having two national championships in individual events is desirable--in fact, that it is healthy for individual events.

I have selected five arguments to support my position. The first is that two national tournaments are needed to accommodate two valid, but divergent, views of what a national tournament should be. One view is that the national tournament should be structured to encourage a large number of students to qualify. The national tournament, then, is a reward for squad members who can place in a final round; it is a vehicle to provide a national level of competition for the team.

Regardless of the number of competitors at nationals, quality will surface. This type of nationals is especially appealing to the program director who wants to take as many team members as can qualify to nationals. This philosophy is represented by the National Forensic Association.

A second view is that which advocates that the national tournament should be a competition between a limited number of individuals. This is achieved by requiring multiple qualifications and placement in the upper half of finalists in qualifying tournaments. Persons endorsing this point of view believe that nationals is not a reward for the whole squad, necessarily, but for the best members of the team. The national level of competition, then, should be restricted to only a portion of the squad. This philosophy is represented by the American Forensic Association.

The divergence in the philosophy of what a nationals should be is also reflected in the limitations which the two tournaments place upon the number of events which those qualifying for the national tournament may enter. Even if a student qualified in all 10 events, the A.F.A. rules stipulate that the student may only enter 6 of the events. The N.F.A. rules, on the other hand, allow a student to enter all events in which he or she has qualified.

The point is not that either philosophy of a nationals is best, but that there <u>are</u> two dissimilar views, each of which should be recognized. That is one important reason why we need two national tournaments. <u>Neither</u> tournament--as presently structured--can accommodate <u>both</u> philosophies of a nationals.

My second argument is that having two national tournaments is economically wise. Understand that this argument is predicated on the

assumption that one will attend one tournament or the other, but not both. (Those of us who attend both nationals deserve the economic headaches we create for ourselves!) The argument is really very simple: one or the other national is bound to be located closer to you. Since the location is announced the previous spring, you can plan accordingly. Until the advent of two nationals, there wasn't a closer alternative. This year, if you live in Montana, you have a clear-cut choice between a close nationals in Colorado Springs or a long-distance trip to Alabama. Similarly, a program in Florida can cut the cost of nationals by attending the tournament in Montevallo, rather than driving to Air Force. Already many programs have decided that they cannot afford to attend both nationals. But that is not reason to abolish one of them. Instead, having two nationals is one way to reduce the cost of attending a national championship because one of them, in most cases, will be located closer to you.

A third reason why having two nationals is healthy for forensics is that two nationals restores power to the people. This power is exercised in the decision of which national to attend. Possessing the power to decide which nationals to attend increases the importance of customer satisfaction. As a result, both nationals must be responsive to suggestions for improvement and reasonable change--particularly as inflationary pressures force more and more programs to decide which nationals to attend. If either tournament decides not to be responsive, they risk losing customers to "the other game in town."

I have observed increased receptivity to change in the N.F.A. tournament since the advent of the A.F.A. tournament: specifically, a willingness to modify the requirement that the speaker ranked first in the round must receive 100 points and that the speaker ranked last must receive 70, and significant improvement to assure that schools attending

the tournament receive complete results at the conclusion of the tournament, rather than several months later.

Both tournaments have changes to consider. The N.F.A. needs to come to grips with the problem of proxy votes for officers, needs to assure a broader geographical distribution of its officers, and needs to combat domination of sweepstakes by sheer number of entries. The A.F.A. needs to consider suggestions for an open business meeting at the nationals, for more realistic regional boundaries, and for ways to award sweepstakes points to more strongly emphasize quality, rather than number of events entered. In short, then, having two tournaments enhances the ability of directors of forensics to effect reasonable change simply because it provides an alternative should either tournament decide not to listen to suggestions for improvement.

The fourth argument which justifies two national tournaments is this: two nationals enhances the ability to recognize forensic excellence. National recognition and awards at national tournaments impress campus administrators--the people who fund our programs. Having two nationals doubles our ability to provide such recognition. Last year, for example, 456 individual awards and 20 team awards were given at the two nationals. Only 4 students placed in the finals of the same event at both tournaments; the 20 team awards went to 18 different schools.

An argument frequently advanced is that we need only one national champion. I, for one, would ask why? I doubt that either George Mason University or Eastern Michigan University feels that they are not a bonafide champion of a nationals tournament because another school won the other national tournament; I suspect that the schools attending either the A.F.A. or N.F.A. tournament regard the winner of their

tournament as a champion of a nationals regardless of who won the other tournament. The benefits of recognizing nearly twice as many excellent competitors, I would suggest, far outweigh any tangible benefits of naming only one national champion in individual events.

Finally, I would suggest that healthy competition between two nationals to attract participants is likely to induce adoption of innovations which will improve individual events. Four possibilities illustrate my point:

1. To attract participants, either tournament might endorse new events on an experimental or permanent basis. Notice how many tournaments are offering dramatic interp since A.F.A. decided to endorse it?
2. Both tournaments might take steps to improve judge quality. Individual events tournaments have long been guilty of assuming that all judges are qualified to judge any event--that's simply not true. Worse yet, judges who try to suggest that they are not qualified to judge an event are told they <u>have</u> to do so. It's time that we made an effort to assure that the judges meet the same qualification as we require of contestants--and recognize that someone who tries to tell us that they've never head of Walter Fisher should not be judging rhetorical criticism, especially at nationals.
3. Rule innovations for events might be adopted. One suggestion might be the innovative topics being used at some tournaments to turn impromptu into a more clearly defined event, rather than viewing the event as mini-extemp.

4. Finally, either nationals might sponsor an individual events journal, to fill the void left by the Journal of the American Forensic Association.

As a director of a program which has attended both national tournaments since their inception, I feel that having two nationals is desirable. I didn't always feel this way. At one time, I sponsored a motion urging that the newest tournament--A.F.A.--consider merging with the N.F.A. tournament. However, after attending both tournaments and talking with people at the tournaments, I am not certain that the two philosophies can or should be reconciled. With only one tournament, one or the other philosophy of a nationals would prevail; with two, both can exist.

Importantly, for the benefits I have suggested to come about, directors of forensics must make an effort to provide input to each tournament. They can do so by running for office in either organization, by accepting requests to serve on committees, and by attending business meetings at either national. The two national organizations must facilitate such input. They can do so by advance notice of offices to be filled, by advance notice of agendas at business meetings, and by encouraging new blood in the governance of the organization, rather than allowing an inner circle of power to develop.

Though some snipe at the N.F.A. as the quantity vs. the quality tournament and others chide the A.F.A. as the artificial vs. the real nationals, the time has come to accept the fact that there are two full-fledged games in town. Having the second game in town means that both philosophies of what a nationals should be can be recognized; that the cost of attending a nationals can be reduced for many; that consumer satisfaction can generate responsive change; that increased numbers of

students and programs can receive national recognition; and that motivation to adopt innovative change is increased.

I, for one, am pleased that we do have two games in town.